

Impact: A benefit or positive change that takes place outside academia because of your research. RCUK defines it as “the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes to society and the economy. REF came up with “an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia” – which is pretty much the same thing.

Knowledge Exchange: The activities that involve researchers and non-academic partners, users or stakeholders sharing the knowledge produced by research. Examples might include working with a business partner, public engagement workshops or sharing your research with policy makers.

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Hang on a minute! I thought that workshops with the public and giving evidence to policy makers were “doing impact”! Are you saying knowledge exchange and impact are basically the same thing?

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No! Look at the definitions again. Knowledge exchange activities are just that: activities, things you do. Impact is what happens as a result of the activities. That’s the tricky part, because it means a researcher can’t actually “do impact”. You can only undertake activities that enable impact to happen. Impact will happen when other people take up and use your research so that something changes.

Routes to Impact: The means by which you aim for your research to have impact. In effect, these are your knowledge exchange activities. Seeing these activities as “routes to impact” implies you are planning them carefully as part of a sequence that you hope will lead ultimately to a concrete impact. However, be aware that you may well need to modify your plans along the journey!

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This sounds pretty much the same as “routes to impact”. But isn’t this part of a grant application?

Pathways to Impact:

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That’s right. “Pathways to impact” is the phrase coined by RCUK for that part of the grant application which deals with the impact you expect your research to have. RCUK don’t expect you to know for certain what your impact will be, but they expect you to have a plan of activities by which possible impact could be achieved.

Beneficiaries: The people, groups, communities or nations who will benefit from the impact of your research

End Users: The groups, people or companies who will take up your research and use it to bring about change

Stakeholders: Anybody who has a stake in the outcome of your research – perhaps because it will benefit them, or because they are involved in up-taking, using or translating the research into a real-world outcome

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They all sound the same to me!

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They may be – it will depend on your research and the type of impact. The key point is that you must have partners, or stakeholders, if your research is going to have impact – someone must take up and use your research and someone must benefit from it! And the more you involve your partners early on – even in the design stage of your project – the more impact your research is likely to have.

Co-production: This is where researchers and research users work closely together to produce knowledge. Many feel it is the most collaborative and effective way for research to have impact, compared to the more “linear” model in which researchers do research and then it is taken up by users. It might not be possible for everyone, but it’s something to think about.